

Minutes: Dummerston Farmland Protection Committee meeting

December 20, 2017 from 4:00 pm – 5:40 pm.

Present: Jack Manix (Chair), Diana Lischer-Goodband, Read Miller, Elizabeth Wood, Vern Grubinger.

Absent: Nelson Jillson. Guests: Zeke Goodband, Joan Weir.

1. Joan Weir of the Vermont Land Trust (VLT) attended the first part of the meeting and delivered an application to the town's Farmland Protection Fund. She provided the committee with background and answered questions. The application requests \$15,000 from the Fund, as small part of the total funding needed to purchase development rights on 59 acres of farmland owned by Michael Barrett of EZ Moo Acres, LLC. This property, part of the former Moore Farm on Dummerston Station Road, includes 41 acres of prime soils and 17 acres of statewide soils. A 2-acre farmstead would be allowed for farm-related housing. The existing 5-acre farmstead would not be included in the conservation easement.

Based on an appraisal, the cost of purchasing the development rights will be \$300,000. In addition to the \$15,000 requested, the farm owner would provide \$45,000 as a 'bargain sale' and \$240,000 would come from a Vermont Housing and Conservation Board (VHCB) grant. Project costs such as staff time, mapping, closing, etc. will be covered by VLT. The VHCB board will decide on the grant application at its meeting on January 25. If the town had approved the funds requested from the Farmland Protection Fund before that date it would provide support for the grant application.

The committee had a favorable impression of the project and the application to the Fund, based on the quality of the soil, the scenic nature of the property, and the desire to support a well-respected dairy farm in the area. It will review the application and decide on a recommendation at a meeting set for January 3, 2017 from 4-6 pm at the town office. Jack will get a hard copy of the application to Nelson Jillson. Zeke agreed to put the farmland committee on the agenda for the Selectboard meeting on January 18. Jack will be able to attend that meeting to present the committee's recommendation.

2. The town's annual allocation to the Farmland Protection Fund was discussed. Zeke stated that the Selectboard will propose maintaining the allocation at \$2,500. This is the level it has been for several years. The committee decided not to request an increase, given pressures on the town budget. Thus, the Fund is on track to disperse about \$15,000 every six years to support a project. If additional funds are needed for a project, private fund raising could be pursued. Diana said she will look into grant funds to help replace the use of \$15,000 that could be used for the project under consideration.

3. The committee discussed the proposed deletion of reference to LESA (Land Evaluation and Site Assessment) agricultural field ratings from the Town Plan. The committee feels that LESA scores provide valuable information about the quality of fields in the town for agricultural use. It was proposed that we review the most recent draft of the Town Plan and then write a letter to the planning commission expressing our concerns.

4. The committee discussed developing a plan of work for the coming year. There are several areas we could focus on, including: educational events, an on-farm dinner to celebrate local agriculture, or working with the Dummerston school to support purchasing of local foods and visits to local farms. Members were urged to think about the options and we will discuss them at a future meeting.

Respectfully submitted, Vern Grubinger.